

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR		REPORT OF INVESTIGATION
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE		REPORT#: 2016202712R009
OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT		APPROVED
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CASE TITLE	REPORT DATE	CASE NUMBER
GW EXOTICS	11/15/2017	2016202712
	REPORTING OFFICER	CASE STATUS
	Matthew Bryant - SA0753	PENDING
APPROVED BY		
Matthew Bryant, SA0753 - 11/15/2017		
Thomas Karabanoff, SA0512 - 11/27/2017		
Phillip Land, SA0602 - 12/01/2017		
<u>SUBJECTS OF REPORT</u>		
JENNIFER LEIGH BRISTER - M & J EXOTIC TRANSPORT	JEFFREY L LOWE - GREATER WYNNWOOD EXOTIC ANIMAL PARK	
MICHAEL BRISTER - M & J EXOTIC TRANSPORT	JOHN N REINKE	
BETH A CORELY	JOE SCHREIBVOGAL - THE GAROLD WAYNE INTERACTIVE ZOOLOGICAL PARK	
LAUREN FRANKLIN DROPLA	TIMOTHY LEE STARK - WILDLIFE IN NEED & WILDLIFE IN DEED, INC.	
JOHN W FINLAY	KATHRYN OLIVER STEARNS - STEARNS ZOOLOGICAL RESCUE AND	
JOANN E GREEN	REHABILITATION CENTER	
	OMAR VILLARREAL	

SYNOPSIS

This report documents the development of a CPI in September 2017 and documentation of possible violations of money laundering, murder for hire, and wildlife trafficking of endangered species. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Office of Law Enforcement Special Agent Matthew Bryant obtained information that Joseph MALDONADO and Jeff LOWE were using money wires to pay for purchase of endangered species and were creating false documents to conceal the commercial transactions. Other information gained in this investigative period indicates LOWE and MALDONADO are involved in a murder for hire plot to kill Carole Baskin (D.B.A. Big Cat Rescue) in Tampa, Florida.

DISTRIBUTION**Internal List**

Matthew Bryant, SA0753
 Thomas Karabanoff, SA0512
 Phillip Land, SA0602
 Nicholas Chavez, SA0493
 Dan Coil, SA0595
 Phetsamon Souphanya, SA0681

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DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

Information Received from Carole Baskin

Carole Baskin (owner of Big Cat Rescue – Florida) has historically been the subject of numerous threats of violence from Joseph MALDONADO, D.B.A. GREATER WYNNEWOOD EXOTIC ANIMAL PARK (GWEAP), after a civil law suit between them in January 2013 (See R002). During August 2017, Baskin provided suspicious telephone numbers (702-389-0151 and 817-908-6787) she had received from unknown callers to Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Special Agent (SA) Andy Farabow and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Office of Law Enforcement (USFWS/OLE) SA Matthew Bryant.

SA Bryant conducted numerous queries, but could not determine the identity of callers and conducted cold-calls to the numbers. On August 24, 2017, SA Bryant called (817) 908-6787 and the person identified himself as James. SA Bryant advised he was returning missed calls for Baskin. During the initial conversation, the person identified themselves, now known to be CPI-481, and said he had information regarding MALDONADO. SA Bryant identified himself as a USFWS/OLE SA. CPI-481 seemed relieved and stated he was involved with LOWE and MALDONADO and knew a lot of information regarding their activities.

Interview of CPI-481

On September 14, 2017, SA Bryant and USFWS/OLE SA James Markley interviewed CPI-481 at Two Frogs restaurant in Ardmore, Oklahoma. CPI-481 advised he initially contacted Baskin for Jeffrey LOWE (LOWE is the current owner of GWEAP, see R002). LOWE wanted CPI-481 to tell Baskin that he (LOWE) would provide all records from MALDONADO's files and copy the hard-drive of his computer if Baskin would pay him \$500,000. Baskin could then turn the information over to authorities or use it however she wanted. LOWE said he would sign GWEAP over to her and walk away. LOWE also informed CPI-481 that everything about MALDONADO, to include financial information and records related to the business, is located on MALDONADO's computer. CPI-481 explained he was relieved when Baskin did not answer the phone and knew he should not be getting involved any deeper with LOWE and MALDONADO.

CPI-481 stated he has always been involved in operating his own businesses and operated an adult nightclub in Texas for several years, selling it in 2016. This occupation put him in contact with many nefarious people from all walks of life. CPI-481 has known and interacted with LOWE and MALDONADO for several years. CPI-481 also admitted to being involved in interstate trafficking of endangered species and has taken marijuana to MALDONADO upon his

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request. CPI-481 stated he has known MALDONADO for about twenty (20) years, but has actually become close to him over the past year and a half. CPI-481 met LOWE about a year and half ago. CPI-481 considers himself to be friends with both, but closer to LOWE. CPI-481 learned a lot about the crooked side of the business of dealing in captive raised wildlife from MALDONADO and LOWE. CPI-481 advised GWEAP is run exactly the same as it always had been. MALDONADO runs everything even though everything is set up in a new corporation under LOWE. The bank accounts for GWEAP have all been switched into LOWE's name. LOWE and MALDONADO conceal all money MALDONADO makes gets or has access to because of the lawsuit between MALDONADO and Carole Baskin.

CPI-481 stated LOWE is hardly ever at the zoo and lives primarily in Las Vegas. LOWE likes for everyone to think he is wealthy, but he is broke. CPI-481 loaned MALDONADO \$10,000 to build and open a pizza bar at GWEAP during the summer of 2017. CPI-481 asked MALDONADO about repaying the loan several times and received a check in August 2017 from Paul's Valley National Bank for \$5,000, signed by LOWE for partial payment of loan. CPI-481 called LOWE and thanked him for the check and LOWE did not know anything about it. LOWE stated MALDONADO had an account under LOWE's name and MALDONADO was the one who used the account and signed LOWE's name on checks. MALDONADO uses this account for all the money related to selling tiger cubs and other business he may conduct to conceal assets from Carole Baskin. In September 2017, MALDONADO gave CPI-481 a golden tabby tiger cub as repayment for the rest of the loan. The tiger cub is valued at \$5,000-\$10,000. CPI-481 said he received a transfer document from MALDONADO indicating the tiger cub was strictly a donation to CPI-481.

CPI-481 advised MALDONADO is in the business of raising cubs, that is where he makes the greatest money and he has turned into a monster. Breeding and selling tiger cubs takes precedent over animal health/care. In the spring of 2017, LOWE informed CPI-481 that MALDONADO had profited over \$200,000 in six (6) months from selling tiger cubs. When cubs are sold, transactions are done through wire transfers, Walmart to Walmart, using money gram or some money-wire related program Walmart has. Money is never sent directly to MALDONADO, but is sent to John FINLAY, his wife/girlfriend Amber EASTEP (who also works at the zoo), or others in MALDONADO's inner circle. FINLAY does a lot of the transports and usually transports the tiger cubs. MALDONADO also buys tiger cubs, but uses FINLAY or others to send the money for him. MALDONADO keeps a ledger beside his computer which he uses to keep a very detailed account of the tiger cub transactions. Tim STARK is a permitted exhibitor with USDA in Indiana (USDA Permit #32C0204). According to CPI-481, STARK buys most of the cubs from MALDONADO.

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CPI-481 is aware of threats made to Baskin and explained it is constant dialogue with MALDONADO. MALDONADO talks about wanting/wishing her dead all the time. MALDONADO does not usually refer to her by name, referring to her as the bitch in Florida. In approximately April 2017, MALDONADO asked CPI-481 if he knew of someone who would kill Baskin. MALDONADO offered CPI-481 \$10,000 to have Baskin killed and stated LOWE would pay him. MALDONADO has asked several times if CPI-481 has found anyone yet, the most recent inquiry was in late July 2017. CPI-481 visited MALDONADO at the GWEAP office in August 2017 and LOWE was also present. MALDONADO used the office computer to access a google earth map of Baskin's facility and her home. MALDONADO discussed trails and paths accessing areas where Baskin could be found and how she could be taken out without anyone knowing. MALDONADO told CPI-481 that during Hurricane Irma and the following aftermath in Florida, would be a good time to take care of Baskin because there was limited phone service and everything was in a state of chaos. CPI-481 was told by LOWE that MALDONADO's entire life and business history is on the computer in his office and CPI-481 is aware MALDONADO primarily uses email, Facebook messenger, and text to communicate.

CPI-481 got involved with captive raised animals; specifically, tigers, when he was young because of involvement in the circus. CPI-481 owned tigers off and on for over 20 years and previously held a USDA permit. CPI-481 said he got rid of his tigers because of problems he was having with USDA and inspections.

CPI-481 purchased four (4) tigers from MALDONADO in January 2017. CPI-481 had just moved from Florida and was living in Texas at this time. CPI-481 did not move to Oklahoma until February 2017. CPI-481 initially purchased two (2) male tigers named Tommy (brown/white) and Diesel (standard orange) for \$4,000. CPI-481 picked these tigers up from GWEAP on March 17, 2017, and LOWE helped him transport the animals to his residence in Ringling, Oklahoma. In late January 2017, CPI-481 received a telephone call from MALDONADO asking if CPI-481 would purchase more tigers, explaining he needed \$6,000 to pay an attorney fees and needed the money quickly. CPI-481 agreed to purchase two (2) tigers, Rodney (snow white) and Frankie (white with black stripes) for \$6,000. CPI-481 stated these two (2) tigers were worth approximately \$10,000. These tigers were delivered to his residence by a GWEAP employee in June 2017. CPI-481 used his credit card and called the GWEAP office to pay for the four (4) tigers. MALDONADO knew CPI-481 did not live in Oklahoma at the time of the purchases.

CPI-481's long-term girlfriend, Brittany [REDACTED] obtained a USDA permit for the tigers which are kept at their home in Ringling, Oklahoma. She is the permit holder for USDA (Permit 73C032, Ringling Animal Care Center) and obtained the permit in June 2017. CPI-481 was

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given a tiger cub from MALDONADO in September 2017 because MALDONADO said it had a twisted foot and he was going put it down. CPI-481 asked MALDONADO if he could have it instead of MALDONADO killing it.

LOWE told CPI-481 that in June/July 2017, MALDONADO euthanized twelve (12) tigers, shooting one with a gun, to make room for the nineteen (19) tigers he recently "rescued" from Florida in late July 2017, which were removed/transported in violation of a Federal Judge's court order. CPI-481 stated he had learned the nineteen (19) cubs that MALDONADO "rescued" were initially sold to person in Florida by MALDONADO. CPI-481 advised these may have been sold to Kathy STEARNS as she goes through a lot of cubs and is also affiliated with DADE CITY'S WILD THINGS. CPI-481 stated MALDONADO did not "rescue" any animals like he tells the news for publicity, he just went and got tigers that he had previously sold.

LOWE told CPI-481 that a veterinarian was not on site per USDA regulations when the twelve (12) tigers were killed and another zoo employee, named Eric LNU, assisted MALDONADO with these killings. (*Agent's Note: Per USDA regulations, MALDONADO would have to create records of the tigers' deaths to provide to USDA to document acquisition and disposition of animals*). LOWE told CPI-481 that nothing was wrong with the tigers he (MALDONADO) killed. The hides from the dead tigers were taken to TERRY'S TAXIDERMY in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. CPI-481 advised he was not sure what is done with skeletal remains and other valuable parts from tiger carcasses. CPI-481 elaborated it is all about money for MALDONADO and he will sell to anyone and even offered to sell a tiger pelt to one of CPI-481's friends that visited MALDONADO with him.

CPI-481 stated Dr. JoAnn GREEN is the Veterinarian in Wynnewood, Oklahoma, and is the veterinarian used by MALDONADO. CPI-481 stated Dr. GREEN is not always present when animals are given medications or when tigers or other animals are euthanized. CPI-481 stated whatever MALDONADO wants, Dr. GREEN gets for him, to include providing him with controlled medications/drugs to use as he needs.

CPI-481 stated they have so many tigers at the zoo, they cannot keep up with what they have and no one really knows whose cats are whose. LOWE believes he has about 25 big cats at the zoo, a circus also keeps a lion and a tiger there, Jeff REINKE (GWEAP employee) keeps a few cats in the back (a lion called Bonedigger is there for sure) and the rest of the 200 plus animals supposedly belong to MALDONADO and Beth CORLEY. CPI-481 have never seen CORLEY at GWEAP or heard that she has been there. CPI-481 stated he believed the transfer forms received regarding four (4) tigers he purchased from MALDONADO, stated they actually came from Beth CORLEY. (*Agent's Note: Beth CORLEY is a permitted exhibitor with USDA in Oklahoma [USDA Permit # 73C0167] and keeps several big cats at GWEAP.*)

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CPI-481 stated he was aware LOWE and his girlfriend, Lauren DROPLA, are into all kinds of crazy drugs. A lot of hardcore drugs, like ecstasy and probably some other date rape type of drugs. CPI-481 also elaborated that LOWE and DROPLA are very much into crazy sexual activity and try to get girls at the zoo to join them.

CPI-481 stated his girlfriend has always wanted a ring-tailed lemur and on May 9, 2017, he told MALDONADO he wanted a ring-tailed lemur. CPI-481 stated he and MALDONADO both know it is an endangered species. MALDONADO told CPI-481 he would get him one and coordinated the purchase from a contact of his in south Texas for \$1,000 (later determined to be Omar VILLARREAL, Mission Texas, USDA Permit #74B0641). MALDONADO called VILLARREAL while CPI-481 was with him and informed VILLARREAL he (MALDONADO) would cover the purchase with paperwork stating the lemur was born at GWEAP. CPI-481 stated the phone call was conducted in a manner that indicated MALDONADO and VILLARREAL conduct business frequently. The lemur arrived at CPI-481's residence in Ringling, Oklahoma, on May 14, 2017, at 1:00 a.m. MICHAEL and JENNIFER BRISTER, D.B.A. M & J EXOTIC TRANSPORT, brought the lemur to him and he paid them \$1,500 (\$1,000 for the lemur and \$500 for the transport). CPI-481 stated he was led to believe the drivers were supposed to get the money back to VILLARREAL.

SA Bryant asked CPI-481 if he would be willing to introduce undercover SAs to MALDONADO. CPI-481 stated he would work with SA Bryant and informed SA Bryant that it would be no problem getting MALDONADO to conduct business with someone CPI-481 vouched for. CPI-481 elaborated that is the name of the game in the captive wildlife world. All types of crimes are committed and hidden between dealers. CPI-481 also stated MALDONADO is in it for the money and will sell any animal he has, especially when he has bills that are due or behind on.

DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS

GREEN, JoAnn Elizabeth
D.B.A., GREEN's VETERINARY CLINIC
35427 E County Road 1680,
Wynnewood, OK 73098
DOB: [REDACTED]-1970; W/F
SSN: [REDACTED]1438
DL: OK 080671412
Telephone: (405) 665-4507
LID: P364209

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STEARNS, Kathryn P.
D.B.A., DADE CITY'S WILD THINGS
37237 Meridian Ave.
Dade City, FL 33525
DOB: [REDACTED]-1960; W/F/180/5'6"/BLU/ BLD
SSN: [REDACTED]-4879
DL: FL S365-514-60-502-0
Telephone: (352) 467-2504
LID: P283167

VILLARREAL, Omar
Villerreal, Omar Rodriguez Jr.
[REDACTED]
McAllen, TX 78501-6049
DOB: [REDACTED]/1979 or 10/18/1979; W/M/5'8"/175/Hair: BRO
SSN: [REDACTED]-0013
DL: TX-01699783
Telephone: (956) 686-8101
LID: P325054

BRISTER, Jennifer Leigh
D.B.A., M & J EXOTIC TRANSPORT
2627 Sunbury Circle
Memphis, TN 38133
DOB: [REDACTED]1970; W/F/5'6"
SSN: [REDACTED]9781
DL: MS 802466315
Telephone: (850) 866-6620; (901) 215-7710; (850) 867-8775; (901) 482-0138
LID: P364208

Brister, Michael P.
D.B.A., M & J EXOTIC TRANSPORT
7155 Coffeeville CV
Memphis, TN 38133-4883
DOB: [REDACTED]/1979; W/M/ 6'5"
DIS: DL: TN 098042695

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Telephone: (901) 406-3821
LID: P364208

STARK, Timothy Lee
3320 Jack Teeple Rd
Charlestown, IN 47111
DOB: [REDACTED]/1965; W/M/5'10"/165
SSN: [REDACTED] 9849
DL: IN 8945228539
Telephone: Unknown

The following subjects have previously been identified:

MALDONADO, Joseph Allen – see R002.

REINKE, John W. – see R002.

DROPLA, Lauren – see R004.

LOWE, Jeffery L. – see R002.

CORLEY, Beth – see R002.

GREATER WYNNEWOOD EXOTIC ANIMAL PARK - see R002.

PRIOR VIOLATIONS

GREEN, JoAnn E.

1. Arrest date: 11-17-1997 in Garvin County, OK. Arrest for DUI-Liquor. Misdemeanor Charges filed 11-17-1997. Case number: 025-CM 9700641. Arresting agency: Oklahoma Highway Patrol. Disposition – Guilty Plea
2. Crime Details: 11-17-1997 in Garvin County, OK. Traffic Charges: TOC-liquor. Charges filed 11-17-1997. Case number: 025-TR 9701894. Arresting agency: Oklahoma Highway Patrol. Disposition – Guilty Plea
3. Crime Details: 11-17-1997 in Garvin County, Oklahoma. Traffic Charges: operating motor vehicle without current inspection sticker. Charges filed 11-17-1997. Case

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number: 025-TR 9701895. Arresting agency: Oklahoma Highway Patrol. Disposition – Guilty Plea

STEARNS, Kathy O.

NCIC REPORT

1. Arrest date: 07-05-2011 in Pasco Circuit & County Court, FL. Arrested for issuing w/less checks. Misdemeanor Charges filed 12-02-2011. Case # CTC1108731MMAWSSTEARNS. Offense Code 832.05.2. Disposition – W.
2. Arrest date: 06-20-2011 by Pasco County SO. Arrested for obtaining property by worthless check \$150 dollars or over. Booking Number 201108481. Felony Charges filed 06-13-2011. Case #CRC1104032CFAESSTEARNS. Offense Code 832.05. Disposition – W.
3. Arrest date: 04-23-2008 by Pasco County SO. Arrested for FTA obtaining property rtn by worthless check \$150 dollars or over. Booking Number 200805260. Initial Charge of fraud – insufficient funds check. Charges filed 03-04-2008. Case# CTC0801601MMAE. Offense Code 832.05.2. Disposition – W.
4. Arrest Date: 03-06-2007 in Pasco County Circuit & County Court. Arrested for rehab wildlife w/out valid permit. Case# CTC0701692MMAESSTERNNS. Offense Code 372.83.2F. Disposition – Dismissed.
5. Arrest Date: 09-20-2006 in Okaloosa County, FL. Arrested for issuance of insufficient funds by check. Case# 2006CF002360S. Offense Code 832.05(2)(B). Charges filed on 09-20-2006. Disposition Nolle Prosequi.
6. Arrest Date: 10-28-2004 in Rowan County, NC. Arrested for Not Listed. Case# 7902004CR011549. Citation# C4997678. No Offense Code or Disposition.
7. Arrest Date: 10-20-2004 in Rowan County, NC. Arrested for speeding 64 in 55. Case# 01790ROWAN 2004CR01. Offense Code 20-141(B)(G). Fined \$10 and \$10 Court Costs. Disposition Date 01-24-2005.
8. Arrest Date: 02-28-2002 in Pasco Circuit and County Court, FL. Arrested for 1st DEGREE BATTERY. Offense Date: 01-23-2002. Case#

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CTC0201296MMAESSTEARN. Offense Code 784.03. Disposition Date 01-09-2003.
Disposition – Pre-Trial Diversion.

9. Arrest Date: 10-08-2001 in Pasco County, FL. Arrested for POSSESSION OF CLASS II WILDLIFE. Charges filed 11-30-1999. Case# 51512001MM006551A000ES. Offense Code 0372.922. Disposition Date 11-09-2001. Nolo – Contender, Adjudication Withheld. Fined \$41.00 Court Costs.
10. Arrest Date: 10-02-2001 in Sumter County, FL. Arrested for UNLAWFUL SPEED ON LIMITED ACCESS HWY GREATER THAN 70MPH. Case# 01007398TRAXMX. Charges filed 10-11-2001. Disposition Adjudicated Guilty 11-07-2001.
11. Arrest Date: 07-14-2000 in Pasco County, FL. Arrested for DRIVING UNDER INFLUENCE. Case# 51CTC00092992WTE. Offense Code 0316.193. Disposition 02-08-2001, Plea Nolo-Contender, Adjudicated Guilty/Delinquent in Juvenile Court.

LEMIS REPORT

1. Issued NOV on 3/6/2007 for illegal possession of migratory birds in support of INV 2007402620. NOV was dismissed. On this same date and during this same investigation, received civil penalty for violation of the Eagle Protection Act and a federal penalty was assessed.

VILLARREAL, Omar

1. Incarceration Date: 12/17/2004. Release date: 12/17/2004. Charges: theft stolen property >=\$20k <\$100K. Booking #: 259423. State: Texas. Prisoner ID: L-905-04

STARK, Timothy

A query of LEMIS revealed that on January 7, 2008, in Indianapolis, Indiana, Timothy STARK pleaded guilty to selling one (1) federally endangered ocelot that was sold in interstate commerce. STARK paid \$5,000 in fines.

In March 2009, STARK was found to be in possession of three (3) federally protected migratory birds without a state or federal permit; 16 USC 703. STARK paid the \$2,000 violation notice on February 18, 2009.

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A query of the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) on 9/17/2013 revealed the 2008 violation of the Endangered Species Act listed above

WITNESSES

Special Agent Matt Bryant
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of Law Enforcement
2700 Coltrane Place, Ste. 4
Edmond, Oklahoma 73034
(405) 715-0617

Special Agent James Markley
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of Law Enforcement
501 West Felix St, Ste. 1105
Fort Worth, Texas 76115
(817) 334-5202

Brittany Medina
29630 W 1950 Rd
Ringling, OK 73456

LAWS VIOLATED

No new violations of law have been identified at this time.

EVIDENCE

No new evidence has been identified at this time.

Audio Recordings/Video Recordings/Photographs Created by Law Enforcement:

No recordings and/or photographs were created at this time.

Evidence Seized and Maintained by Another Agency:

No evidence is being maintained by another agency at the time.

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ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments to this report.